



**‘MAKING SIMPLE CHANGES
TO THE FOOD YOU EAT CAN
HAVE A BIG EFFECT’**

ONE
SMALL
CHANGE...

LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL

Feeling confused about cholesterol? It's a tricky subject but one well worth taking to heart. Nutritionist *Anita Bean* explains what it's all about and how to keep your levels in check

Cholesterol. It's a word that instantly makes us think of poor health, perhaps without really understanding why. So, what is cholesterol and what are its health implications? Cholesterol is a fatty substance that circulates via the bloodstream. Though it's associated with certain foods such as meat, eggs and shellfish, the majority is actually produced by the body (in the liver) and it's essential for making vitamin D, hormones and cell membranes.

Problems arise when we have too much of it in the blood. More than half of adults living in the UK and Ireland have high cholesterol (see box, right) and may be unaware of it. The cholesterol itself doesn't usually cause any symptoms, but it does increase your risk of serious health conditions.

"Excess cholesterol can be laid down in the walls of the arteries," explains Lynne Garton, »

CHOLESTEROL THE HIGHS, THE LOWS & WHAT IT ALL MEANS

TOTAL CHOLESTEROL

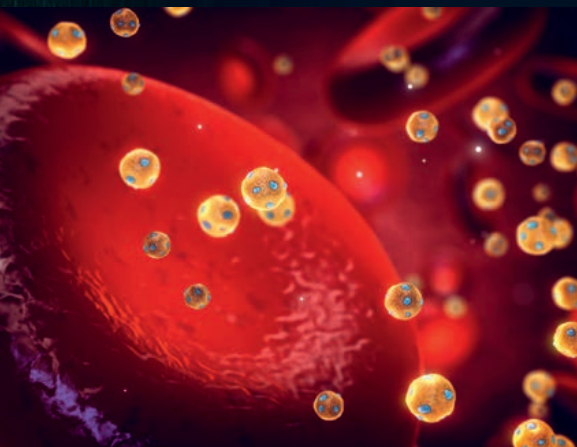
should be 5 mmol/L or lower for healthy adults. If you're aged between 40 and 74 and live in England, you're eligible for a free NHS Health Check which, among other things, will determine your total cholesterol as well as levels of HDL ('good') cholesterol and non-HDL ('bad') cholesterol.

HIGH DENSITY

LIPOPROTEIN (HDL) helps take cholesterol out of the blood, so a higher HDL is positive. Levels should be above 1.2 mmol/L for women; above 1 mmol/L for men (although very high levels may not give extra protection).

LOW DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN (LDL)

can build up on artery walls and increase your risk of heart disease. Other lipoproteins in addition to LDL can also be harmful and are measured collectively as 'non-HDL' cholesterol. Levels should be lower than 4 mmol/L.



High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is often known as 'good' cholesterol as it helps protect your heart

'LEVELS OF CHOLESTEROL REACH A PEAK IN PEOPLE IN THEIR 60S & 70S'

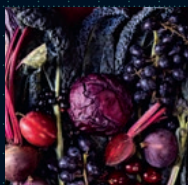
dietetic adviser at Heart UK. "This builds up into a fatty plaque and, over time, deposits get bigger, resulting in narrowing of the arteries and [potentially] blockage, a process called atherosclerosis. Depending on where the build-up occurs, it can result in coronary heart disease or heart attack, stroke, vascular dementia or peripheral arterial disease."

Levels of cholesterol increase with age, especially in women after the menopause, reaching a peak in people in their 60s and 70s. Smoking, drinking alcohol and lack of physical activity can result in moderate increases in blood cholesterol, and being overweight or having too much body fat around your middle also increases the risk. New findings suggest that having even slightly raised cholesterol levels in your 30s or 40s can significantly increase your chances of developing heart disease too.

That said, making simple changes can lower your levels. It may seem counterintuitive, but eating high-cholesterol foods (such as eggs, liver and shellfish) won't necessarily raise your cholesterol, although eating foods high

FOODS TO LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL

Heart UK recommends eating some of these six foods every day as part of a healthy diet.



FRUIT & VEG

At least 5 servings a day
(5 x 80g)

OATS & BARLEY

3 servings a day (a serving is 30g oats, 75g cooked pearl barley, 3 oatcakes or 250ml oat drink)



SOYA FOODS

2-3 servings a day (a serving is 250ml soya drink, 150g soya yogurt alternative or 100g tofu)

FOODS FORTIFIED WITH STEROLS & STANOLS

1-3 servings a day (a serving is 10g fortified spread, 1 x 120g fortified yogurt or 1 x 65-100g fortified drink)**



NUTS

28-30g a day
(around a handful)

OILY FISH

At least 1 x 140g serving (such as salmon, sardines or mackerel) a week

in saturated fat – such as red meat, butter and biscuits – will. "Cholesterol in food has only a very small effect on blood cholesterol. It's saturated fats that raise cholesterol in our blood," explains Lynne. "Replacing saturated fat with unsaturated fat, found in nuts, seeds and plant-based oils, as well as eating more fruit, vegetables and fibre, can have a powerful effect on reducing blood cholesterol levels."

Fruit, veg, nuts, oats and barley are among the cholesterol-lowering foods we should be prioritising on our plates (see box, left), as are soya-based foods and those with added plant stanols and sterols. Never heard of sterols and stanols? They're plant chemicals with a make-up similar to cholesterol that are absorbed by the intestines during digestion, blocking the uptake of some cholesterol. They occur naturally in some foods but not in large enough quantities to lower cholesterol dramatically, so food companies have created a range of fortified foods – yogurts, spreads and the like – containing them. Benecol and Flora ProActiv are the main brands.

A daily intake of 1.5-3g of plant sterols or stanols has been shown to lower LDL cholesterol by 7.5-12% – but as yet there is insufficient long-term evidence to show that they also reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. They can be expensive too (and not suitable for all people), so are worth seeking out only if high cholesterol is a real issue. In the UK, eating a healthy, balanced diet remains the advice for the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

It's a simple message: to lower cholesterol, eat less butter, red meat, cakes and pastries, and include heart-healthy unsaturated fats. A plant-rich diet will help, as will eating the six key cholesterol-lowering foods (left). Researchers in Canada found that people who followed a strict plant-based diet centred around soy protein, plant sterols, nuts and soluble fibre lowered their cholesterol levels by almost 29% in a month – similar to the effect of the cholesterol-lowering medication known as statins. Oh, and don't forget about exercise: at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a week is recommended.

Anita Bean is a registered nutritionist. She has worked with the London Marathon and is the author of The Vegan Athlete's Cookbook and The Runner's Cookbook.



Better health

The latest tips, trends and updates, plus diet and wellbeing questions answered by Waitrose nutritionist *Joanne Lunn*

LOVE YOUR LENTILS

Swapping half your white rice or potatoes for lentils could lower blood-sugar levels by up to 35%, according to a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition*. Consistently high blood sugar can contribute to insulin resistance, which causes type 2 diabetes.

A(nother) good reason for a cuppa

More good news if you regard tea as one of life's pleasures. Drinking two or more cups daily can protect your heart and help you live longer, according to a UK Biobank study of half a million people. Scientists found tea drinkers had a 9-13% lower risk of death from any cause than those who don't drink it. The temperature, or adding milk or sugar, didn't change the results.



HOW CLEAN IS YOUR WATER BOTTLE?

Reusable bottles are a great way of cutting down on single-use plastic, but refilling them without washing properly can lead to a build-up of harmful bacteria. To minimise the risk of gastric illness, wash your bottle a few times a week with hot soapy water, using a brush to scrub the cap.



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ASK THE NUTRITIONIST

Joanne has an MSc and a PhD in nutrition and has been a Partner for 14 years

Q Can the symptoms of menopause be managed through diet and nutrition?
Annette, Northumberland

A During the menopause, the body experiences changes in the balance of hormones, which can prompt a whole range of physical, emotional and mental symptoms. Hot flushes and night sweats are two of the most commonly experienced symptoms, but there are many more to be aware of, including (but not limited to) reduced concentration, fatigue, muscular aches and bone and joint pain.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and reducing caffeine and alcohol intake can help to reduce or relieve symptoms for some women. Include wholegrains, get your 30g fibre daily and hit your target of five fruit and veg portions each day. Avoiding hot and spicy foods can lessen hot flushes. I also recommend a vitamin D supplement all year round (10µg/day), as well as topping up other bone-healthy vitamins and minerals such as vitamin K, calcium, magnesium and phosphorus.

Emerging evidence also suggests that some plant foods containing compounds called phytoestrogens can help alleviate some of the symptoms of the menopause. These are found in soya-based foods, flaxseeds, grains, fruit and veg. The good news is that all these foods are also excellent sources of vitamins, minerals, fibre, omega-3 fats and plant protein.

There is a lot more to successfully managing peri- and post-menopause than just diet tips, however, and it's always recommended to get advice from a medical professional.

Do you have a question for Joanne? Email waitrose.food@dentsu.com putting 'Ask the nutritionist' in the subject line.